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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR JONATHAN MITCHELL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GJ](#)
SUBJECT: GRENADA ELECTIONS IN THE SEASON OF CARNIVAL

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Grenadians describe the 2008 election cycle as carnival-like (Grenada's 2008 Carnival will take place August 11 - 12) with political parties waving party colors and rushing from point to point around the tri-island state staging entertainment-fueled rallies. Several candidates have allegedly received death threats, and many of post's interlocutors say that this is the ugliest campaign season they have experienced in recent memory, with the race focusing less on issues than personal animosities. Election-related destruction of property and verbal and physical attacks on opponents appear to be increasing, despite party promises to run clean campaigns. Rumors abound that even if the NDC wins a majority, the current political leader will be pushed aside to make way for a more radical leadership to grab power. Two candidates face criminal charges, one for fraud and one for assault, but neither has pulled out of the race. The U.S. has contributed funding and personnel to the Organization of American States' (OAS) election observer mission to be led by Deputy Secretary General Ramdin, July 3 - 9. END SUMMARY

Campaign in Full Swing

¶2. (SBU) As the campaign enters its final week, the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), is hoping that the momentum for change that marked recent elections elsewhere in the region will help sweep them into power in Grenada. Hence, one of their three main slogans is "NDC, the heartbeat of change". The NDC is running on a platform promising to reduce the cost of living, provide free college education for all who qualify, provide jobs and housing for all, remove the hurricane reconstruction levy, and stimulate agriculture. The party released its manifesto during the last week in June -- a glossy, multi-page production that the New National Party (NNP) promptly ridiculed at great length as copied verbatim from the Barbados Democratic Labour Party's (DLP) manifesto with a few word and picture changes. As the DLP leadership has been advising the NDC leadership, as well as providing monetary support, this is not surprising. The NDC is defending itself against the plagiarism charge in this week's press.

¶3. (U) The governing New National Party (NNP) is running on the theme "let the progress continue". The party's platform enumerates its accomplishments over the last 13 years and promises continuing reconstruction, improvements to education and social services. Prime Minister Keith Mitchell has used the power of incumbency to resolve issues even as the party campaigns. For example, he announced at the end of June a deal with the two unions representing the majority of the public service workers to establish a pension plan. The People's Revolutionary Government had ended the public service workers pensions in 1979 when it seized power, and this has been a major bone of contention for all governments since then.

¶4. (U) The United Labour Platform (ULP), which brings together the Grenada United Labour Party and the People's Liberation Movement, has far less money than its two major rivals and is

therefore less of a presence in the election campaign. The ULP claims to have the best chance of improving labor conditions of all the parties. The party is also interested in offshore oil and gas development, and has pledged to resolve once and for all Grenada's maritime boundary disputes with Venezuela and other Caribbean islands.

Voting Days - July 4 and 8

¶5. (U) In order to field a full contingent of police to maintain order on Election Day, Grenada's Parliament in May amended the country's election law to allow a separate voting day for the approximately 900 members of the Royal Grenada Police Force (RGPF). The police officers are not allowed to opt to vote on the general election day. Thus, RGPF officers will vote on July 4 while the rest of the population goes to the polls July 8. The head of the Parliamentary Elections Office has assured the public that the police list will be available on July 3 and the general list on July 5. NDC and non-governmental organizations complain that this is not good enough, since the lists were promised several weeks ago.

¶6. (SBU) OAS Deputy Secretary General Albert Ramdin is scheduled to arrive in Grenada on July 3 to lead the OAS Election Observer Mission (EOM). USOAS provided USD 55,000 to support the EOM. Five officials from the U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown will participate. The U.S. participation brings the number of observers to approximately 27, close to the OAS goal of 30. NDC announced publicly before they had met Ramdin in mid-June that they did not believe he could be unbiased, and they have not changed their stance. It would appear that they are positioning the party to cry foul if they lose the election.

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Rumor, Threats, and Videotape

¶7. (SBU) Grenadians, as one RGPF officer recently admitted, enjoy creating "malicious mischief". Rumor and innuendo have run rampant. Alleged misdeeds of the PM and others in the ruling New National Party (NNP) are being recycled, including accusations that Mitchell took US\$500,000 from German businessman Eric Resteiner and that Deputy Prime Minister Gregory Bowen demanded a bribe from a U.S. businessman in order to issue a license to drill for oil and gas. The allegations are not new but they have been reinvigorated by the campaign. Reports circulated during the week of June 23 that the so-called "briefcase videotape", allegedly showing Mitchell receiving money from Resteiner, had finally surfaced. None of post's interlocutors could actually say they had seen it. The Grenada Today, an anti-NNP weekly, frustrated that the original tape was not made public (it remains in the hands of Resteiner and/or his attorney as far as we know) supposedly put together their own version in 2005, which was almost immediately exposed as a fake, and it is possible that the fake has resurfaced. Mitchell and his wife were named last year in a civil suit in the United States attempting to recover US\$1 million from a range of Grenadians and others alleged to have benefited from the fraud.

¶8. (SBU) On July 1, local rumor-mongerers struck again, this time about Chinese-made tee-shirts. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is allegedly providing most of the NDC's promotional items, including yellow tee shirts with various party slogans, billboards, posters, flyers, etc., in addition to large amounts of cash. According to this latest rumor, the NNP asked the PRC provide them with green tee shirts with their slogan but discovered when the shipment arrived boxes full of yellow tee-shirts with the NNP "let the progress continue" slogan on them. The NNP supposedly refused delivery and the shirts sit unclaimed at the port. We have no independent verification.

¶9. (SBU) Concerns about the pasts of several National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidates as active members of the now-defunct New Jewel Movement (NJM) of Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard [which fomented the 1979 coup and the subsequent repressive People's Revolutionary Government (PRG)] are spoken of in

whispers. Some older Grenadians, especially those imprisoned by the revolutionaries, fear that if NDC takes power, these individuals will revert to type. In addition, there has been a revival of longstanding rumors that, should the NDC win, current NDC political leader Tillman Thomas would be pushed aside or otherwise removed (we have heard each of these variations) so that one of the former NJM members could take over.

¶10. (SBU) The liberal use of revolutionary-era language by NDC candidates has exacerbated fears among some Grenadians that intimidation could be used against voters when they cast their ballots. The NNP's youngest candidate alleged in late June that he and his mother have received death threats. Another NNP candidate was told recently that "when the NDC wins, we will deal with you". While the threats have not deterred either candidate from running, both families are worried about their safety. The police have called on the population to maintain calm and the political parties to respect their opponents. Mitchell and Thomas have also urged calm. Local non-governmental organizations, which drafted a code of conduct that all political parties have now signed, are expressing concern about the increasing "tribalism" of the campaign process. There are reports of tee shirts burned, billboards vandalized, posters torn down, and verbal and physical attacks on rival party supporters.

¶11. (SBU) Two candidates, one ULP, and one NNP, are campaigning with criminal charges pending. ULP's Reynold Benjamin was charged with fraud several months ago in connection with his relationship with Capital Bank International, a local failed institution. NNP's Fitzroy Bideau was charged on July 1 with assault for grabbing and threatening a 17-year old girl after she taunted him with his record as Commissioner of Police (COP).

NOTE: Bideau was COP during Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and was fired for incompetence after he remarked that "police are people too" in response to multiple reports of RGPF officers looting abandoned shops and houses when they were supposed to be stopping looters. Should they win seats and then be convicted, special elections would have to be held.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) Grenada's election is too close to call at this point. Grenadians are frustrated by the lack of solid information coming out of the campaigns and the level of personal attacks. About 21 percent of those polled recently said they were undecided. Embassy contacts speculate that people do not trust pollsters not to tell others how they will vote, as they themselves would not keep someone else's vote a secret if they

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knew. Grenadians supporting the NNP read the result as positive for their party, and those supporting the NDC say it means their party will win. A third school of thought is that Grenadians are waiting to see who will give them the best handout - an electoral tradition in Grenada. Bushing, which also takes place around major holidays, is a boon to the unemployed and involves gangs of people paid by politicians to clear brush and clean roads in their neighborhoods. Grenadians take pride in keeping their villages clean and brightly painted, but in the run-up to the election, the country is the cleanest it has been in a long time. The violence, the death threats, and the use of political party colors almost as gang colors has also turned many Grenadians off. They say they will vote, but mostly they want the process over with, regardless of who wins.
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